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Historical Society of Palm Desert
Box 77 - Palm Desert, Ca. 92261
Phone: (619) 346-6588

SPRING/SUMMER 1993 "THE HOURGLASS" NEWSLETTER

IN THE BEGINNING...

"This community needs a school, a church, and a fire station' were thoughts uppermost in the mind of Cliff Henderson, Palm Desert's founder. In 1946 ground was broken and a dream began to be a reality.

AND NOW...

The original fire station, located on a site donated by Mr. Henderson, became the headquarters for the Historical Society of Palm Desert in the fall of 1992. The Society is dedicated to collecting, preserving, cataloging and maintaining local data. Its goals are to make this information accessible to the public; to assist the school district to further student appreciation of local culture, the community and the historic environment; to cooperate with other cultural and public agencies; and to ensure an accurate focus on past city and community events.

In the able hands of Ed Mullins, president of the Society, business is flourishing in a shipshape headquarters. He is advised by a consultant, Jan Holmlund, recently of the Edward Dean Museum. Under Ed's direction, a corp group of volunteers keeps the place humming: Bonnie Bowie acts as office manager, Ginny Folkers works on media archives, and Roger Keezer is the expert on films, photos and V.C.R.

THE EL PASEO FIRE STATION

Since accepting the restored fire station from the City, the Society has been using the east wing as an administrative headquarters. The archives center and the slide/photo film library named for John Kennedy, the J. K. who was a former president of the Society, are located here.

The central portion of the building houses an impressive gift received in February 1993. Engine No. 1, originally used by the Palm Desert Volunteer Fire Company, was beautifully restored over a three month period by volunteer Romeo Mata, a fire apparatus engineer, and thanks to Palm Desert Rotary for picking up the tab. Here also is a display case full of fire department equipment and a mobile exhibit developed by the Society entitled "History of the Cove Communities." It features themes important to the establishment of modern life in the desert. According to History News of Nov. 1983, published by the American Assoc. for State & Local History...."It covers conflicts between ranching and agricultural interests and resort and country club developers; desert survival with scarce water, harsh summers, occasional sandstorms, and a variety of snakes; and the impact of World War II and the nearby Desert Training Center established by General Patton."

The Henderson Wing, the west portion of the building, contains memorabilia of Cliff Henderson and is overseen by his widow, Marian Henderson. His desk and photos of early Palm Desert are located here. Also on display are materials and recognitions from his earlier careers in World Wars I and II, and from his positions as director of the National Air Races and builder of the Pan Pacific Auditorium in Los Angeles. All of these fetes were accomplished by this dynamic man while much of the future Palm Desert was still virgin sand and tumble weeds.

LOOKING GOOD!

If you have admired the "new look" at Society headquarters, credit goes Robert Clark, a member of Boy Scout Troop 105. Robert is an aspiring Eagle Scout and his project to enhance the Historical Society is the culmination of his efforts. All work and material was donated. Robert wishes to thank his family, troop members, and the following individuals and businesses: Kevin Wheat, Lumberman's and Houston Lumber in Indio, and Homebase in Palm Desert. The new fence and paint job was accomplished in three work sessions which Robert had planned and outlined. His proposal was accepted by the Society's board of directors on March 31, and by May 3 the entire project was completed. Kudos to these up and coming Scouts!

FOUNDER'S DAY FESTIVITIES

This annual event honoring Clifford Henderson was held on May 12 this year at Society headquarters. Fay Bowie, keeper of the guest book, reported that about fifty members and guests were in attendance. There was a happy aura of nostalgia as the "Do you remember when?" question popped up frequently. Old timers and history buffs admired the exhibits and photos, and rotated into the film library where Circuit City's gift of a TV/VCR was being put to good use showing Ted Lennon's fine video on Palm Desert's founding and development. Evie Chevoor, past Founder's Day award recipient presided at the punch bowl and goodies table. Ed Mullins, president of the Society and also past honoree, Mayor Jean Benson, and Councilman Buford Crites each spoke briefly.

The surprised recipient of the Founder's Day award for 1993 , Lee Valdez, was introduced by Marian Henderson. Mr. Valdez worked closely with Cliff in Palm Desert's early days at Firecliff Lodge and on many other projects. He continues to assist Mrs. Henderson in Desert Beautiful and Historical Society endeavors.

RECENT BOARD ACTION

The board of the Society voted on final passage of the new bylaws at their April 28 meeting (as a member, you may request a copy.) They reviewed a proposed schedule of calendar items for the remainder of the year, and adopted a schedule of events for 1993-1994. Two thousand dollars was released to be used in the John C. Kennedy memorial film library, and a portion of funds recently received from the City was earmarked for a wall exhibit and promotional materials to be developed by Howard Schureman & Assoc. over the summer months. The board also approved work to be done to clean and protect the Clifford Henderson bust which is located in the El Paseo median.

THIS SUMMER....

The executive committee and a skeleton crew will continue to work and man the office until full activity resumes in the fall. Mr. Mullins salutes those volunteers who have maintained a weekly three-day schedule of being open to the public, and who have worked on various projects through the winter and spring months.

WE NEED YOU....

Ed extends a cordial invitation to all who would like to get involved. There's much to be done in administrative and curatorial work, identifying collections, filing, typing, addressing, and developing a docent program. Whatever your talents may be, plan to give some time in the fall---come join in the FUN!! The Historical Society is now in a significant revitalization process which will make it a true community asset, one of which we'll all be proud in years to come. A solid groundwork is being laid and your support is needed: your membership, your time, and funding to realize the Society's "wish list".....make that "needs list." Please call to offer your ideas and your services.

LOOKING AHEAD TO FALL

Look for an invitation to the fall luncheon in Late September, which will be held at a location of historic interest. President Mullins is lining up an interesting program with a guest speaker.

Building on our fire department heritage, a mini-muster is being planned for October. This is a safety program undertaken through cooperation with the Fire Department and the Public Schools, which we hope will become an annual event. Initially, only second graders will participate. Activities will include games and contests designed to teach the youngsters safety techniques for themselves and others, and prizes will be provided by the Historical Society.

In November there will be a dedication and a plaque laid at the original site of Palm Desert City Hall. The Society will cooperate with the City of Palm Desert on this event, and also on a recognition day of the 20th anniversary of incorporation of Palm Desert. Please be there for both celebrations. This is OUR TOWN!!

DID YOU KNOW?

....that on very early maps, the present location of Palm Desert was an unreliable watering place known as "Sand Hole."

....that one of the first large landholders in the valley was King Gillette of razor blade fame.

....that the location of Highway 74 (Palms to Pines Highway) was once called Dead Indian Trail.

....that the large building of Spanish/Pueblo architecture on the corner of Hwy.111 and the east end of El Paseo was the area's first large structure, and was constructed at a cost of $300,000 in 1948.

....that Cliff Henderson had three brothers who were also instrumental in the early development of Palm Desert.

....that in November 1946 the newly formed Palm Desert Corporation sold $350,000 worth of real estate with Leonard Firestone, Edgar Bergen and Harold Lloyd being among its backers.

See you in the fall!!

Theda Lundquist,
Editor